How Is Your School District Performing?

A look at

Franklin County Technical School

2004–2006

EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL

Office of Educational Quality and Accountability

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The five-member Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) and its agency, the Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA), were established by the Massachusetts Legislature in July 2000 to examine public school districts in the commonwealth. The mission of the EMAC and EQA is to provide independent verification of schools' and districts' efforts to promote higher levels of academic achievement among their students, as measured by the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests.

The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability would like to acknowledge the professional cooperation extended to the audit team by the Massachusetts Department of Education; the superintendent of the Franklin County Vocational Technical School District, Richard Lane; the school department staff; and the town officials of Bernardston, Buckland, Colrain, Conway, Deerfield, Erving, Gill, Greenfield, Heath, Leyden, Montague, New Salem, Northfield, Orange, Shelburne, Sunderland, Warwick, Wendell, and Whately.

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INTRODUCTION

Test scores provide one method of assessing student achievement, but a variety of factors affect student performance. The Office of Educational Quality and Accountability (EQA) was created to examine many of these additional factors by conducting independent audits of schools and districts across the commonwealth. The agency uses these audits to:

- Provide a comprehensive evaluation of each school district's performance;
- Publish annual reports on selected districts' performance;
- Monitor public education performance statewide to inform policy decisions; and
- Provide the public with information that helps the state hold districts and schools, including charter schools, accountable.

In June 2007, the EQA conducted an independent examination of the Franklin County Regional Vocational Technical School District for the period of 2004–2006. The EQA analyzed Franklin County students' performance on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests and identified how students in general and in subgroups were performing. The EQA then examined critical factors that affected student performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency.

The review was based on documents supplied by the Franklin County Regional Vocational Technical School District and the Massachusetts Department of Education; correspondence sent prior to the EQA team's site visit; interviews with representatives from the school committee, the district leadership team, school administrators, and teachers; numerous classroom observations; and additional documents submitted while the EQA team visited the district. The report does not take into account documents, revised data, or events that may have occurred after June 2006. However, district leaders were invited to provide more current information.

Putting the Data in Perspective

Turners Falls, MA

DISTRICT

Population: 64,124 (combined total)
Median family income: range of $43,194 to $66,488
Largest sources of employment: Educational, health, and social services; and manufacturing
Local government: varies among the 19 member towns

SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

School committee: 24 members
Number of schools: 1
Student-teacher ratio: 9.7 to 1
Per Pupil Expenditures: $17,508
Student enrollment:
Total: 543
White: 95.2 percent
Hispanic: 1.5 percent
African-American: 1.8 percent
Asian-American: 1.1 percent
Native American: 0.4 percent
Limited English proficient: 0.0 percent
Low income: 26.2 percent
Special education: 26.0 percent

Sources: 2000 U.S. Census and Massachusetts Department of Education.

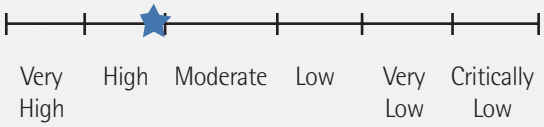
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT AUDIT COUNCIL ACTION

After reviewing this report, the Educational Management Audit Council voted to accept its findings at its meeting on October 24, 2007.

MCAS Performance at a Glance, 2006

	DISTRICT	STATE
Average Proficiency Index	81	78
English Language Arts Proficiency Index	84	84
Math Proficiency Index	79	72

Performance Rating



The Average Proficiency Index is another way to look at MCAS scores. It is a weighted average of student performance that shows whether students have attained or are making progress toward proficiency, which means they have met the state's standards. A score of 100 indicates that all students are proficient. The Massachusetts DOE developed the categories presented to identify performance levels.

HOW DID STUDENTS PERFORM?

Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Test Results

Students in grades 3–8 and grade 10 are required to take the MCAS tests each year in one or more specified subject areas, including English language arts (ELA), math, and science and technology/engineering (STE). Beginning with the class of 2003, students must pass the grade 10 math and ELA tests to graduate. Those who do not pass on the first try may retake the tests several more times.

The EQA analyzed current state and district MCAS results to determine how well district students as a whole and subgroups of students performed compared to students throughout the commonwealth, and to the state goal of proficiency. The EQA analysis sought to answer the following five questions:

1. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

On the 2006 MCAS tests in ELA and math, eligible students in Franklin County participated at levels that met or exceeded the state's 95 percent requirement.

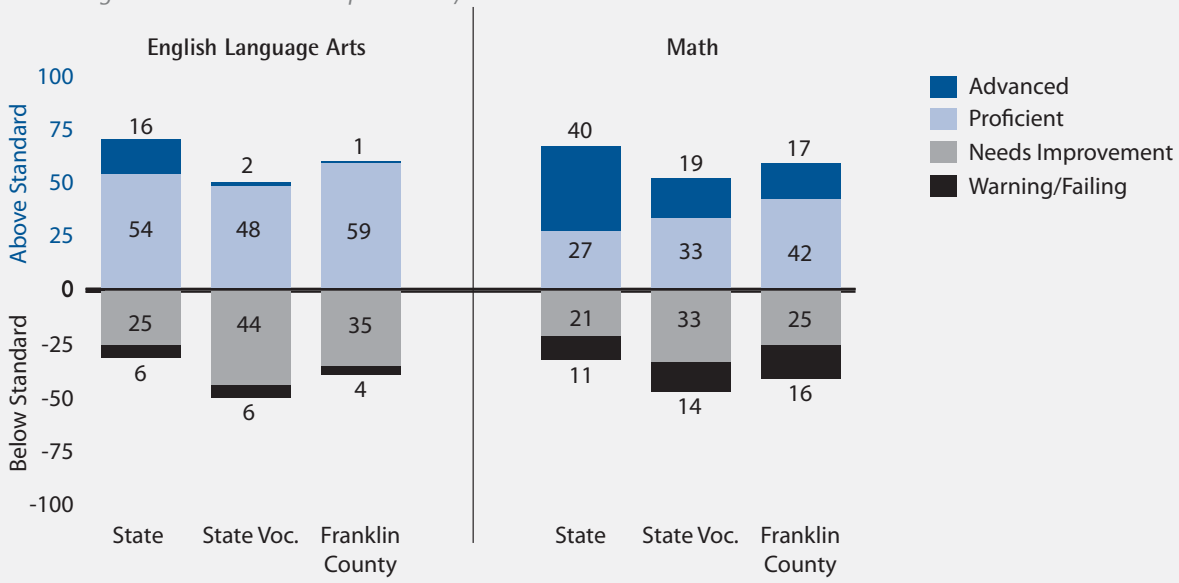
2. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on the MCAS examination?

On average, nearly three-fifths of all students in Franklin County attained proficiency on the 2006 MCAS tests, 10 percentage points less than the grade 10 statewide average but seven percentage points more than the statewide vocational school district average. Three-fifths of Franklin County students attained proficiency in English language arts (ELA), and nearly three-fifths of Franklin County students attained proficiency in math. Ninety-nine percent of the Class of 2006 attained a Competency Determination.

- Franklin County's average proficiency index (API) on the MCAS tests in 2006 was 81 proficiency index (PI) points, four PI points lower than that of grade 10 students statewide and three PI points higher than that of vocational school districts statewide. Franklin County's average proficiency gap, the difference between its API and the target of 100, in 2006 was 19 PI points.

FRANKLIN COUNTY SCORES COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES, 2006

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



- In 2006, Franklin County's proficiency gap in ELA was 17 PI points, three PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in grade 10 ELA and four PI points narrower than the gap for vocational school districts statewide. This gap would require an average improvement in performance of two PI points annually to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP).
- Franklin County's proficiency gap in math was 21 PI points in 2006, four PI points wider than the state's average proficiency gap in grade 10 math and two PI points narrower than the gap for vocational school districts statewide. This gap would require an average improvement of less than three PI points per year to achieve AYP.

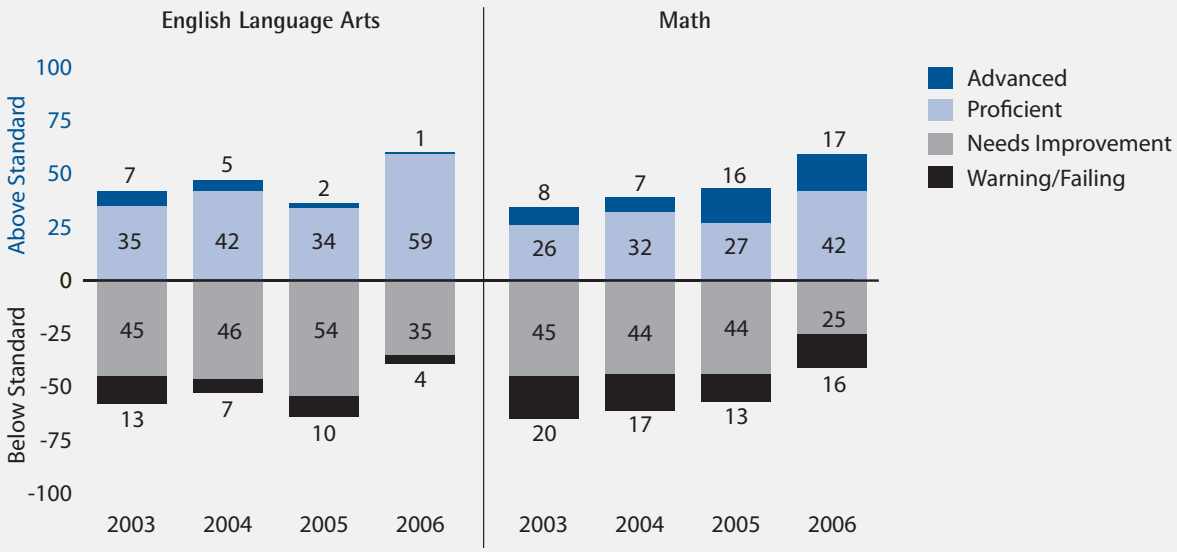
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?

Between 2003 and 2006, Franklin County's MCAS performance showed considerable improvement overall, in ELA, and in math, with especially strong gains between 2005 and 2006.

- The percentage of students scoring in the 'Advanced' and 'Proficient' categories rose by 20 percentage points between 2003 and 2006, while the percentage of students in the 'Warning/Failing' category decreased by six percentage points. The average proficiency gap in Franklin County narrowed from 30 PI points in 2003 to 19 PI points in 2006. This resulted in an improvement rate, or a closing of the proficiency gap, of 37 percent.
- Over the three-year period 2003-2006, Franklin County showed improvement in ELA, improving by 11 PI

FRANKLIN COUNTY ELA SCORES COMPARED TO MATH SCORES

Percentage of students at each proficiency level on MCAS



points, or an average of three and two-thirds PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 40 percent, a rate higher than that required to meet AYP.

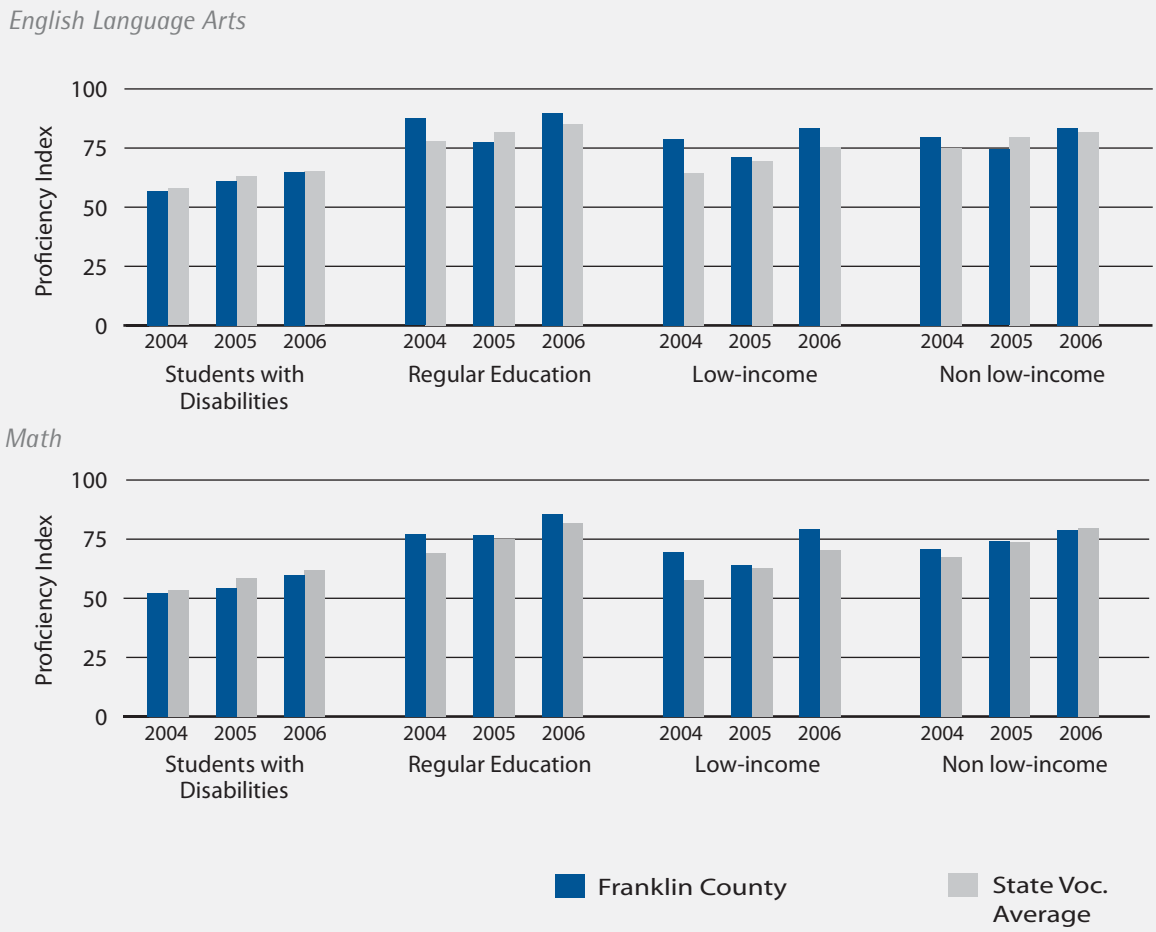
- Math performance in Franklin County likewise showed improvement during this period, also improving by 11 PI points, or an average of nearly three and three-fourths PI points annually. This resulted in an improvement rate of 35 percent, also a rate higher than that required to meet AYP.

4. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students?

MCAS performance in 2006 varied substantially among subgroups of Franklin County students. Of the six measurable subgroups in Franklin County in 2006, the gap in performance between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups was 26 PI points in ELA (female students, students with disabilities, respectively) and 26 PI points in math (regular education students, students with disabilities, respectively).

- The proficiency gaps in Franklin County in 2006 in both ELA and math were wider than the district average for students with disabilities and male students. Less than one-third of students with disabilities attained proficiency, and less than three-fifths of male students did so.
- The proficiency gaps in ELA and math were narrower than the district average for regular education students and female students. Two-thirds or more of the students in each subgroup attained proficiency.
- The proficiency gap for low-income students (those participating in the free or reduced-cost lunch pro-

FRANKLIN COUNTY STUDENTS' IMPROVEMENT OVER TIME, COMPARED TO STATE AVERAGES



gram) was wider than the district average in ELA but narrower in math, while the proficiency gap for non low-income students was the same as the district average in ELA but wider in math. Approximately three-fifths of the students in both subgroups attained proficiency.

5. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?

In Franklin County, the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in ELA widened from 16 PI points in 2003 to 25 PI points in 2006, and the performance gap between the highest- and lowest-performing subgroups in math widened from 12 PI points in 2003 to 26 PI points in 2006.

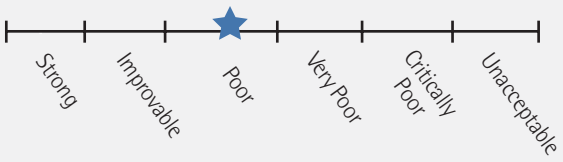
- Regular education students and non low-income students in Franklin County had improved performance in ELA between 2003 and 2006. The more improved subgroup in ELA was regular education students.
- All student subgroups with the exception of students with disabilities had improved performance in math between 2003 and 2006. The most improved subgroup in math was low-income students.

Performance at a Glance

Management Quality Index

The Management Quality Index is a weighted average of the district's performance on 67 indicators that measure the effectiveness of a district's management system. Franklin County received the following rating:

Performance Rating:



WHAT FACTORS DRIVE STUDENT PERFORMANCE?

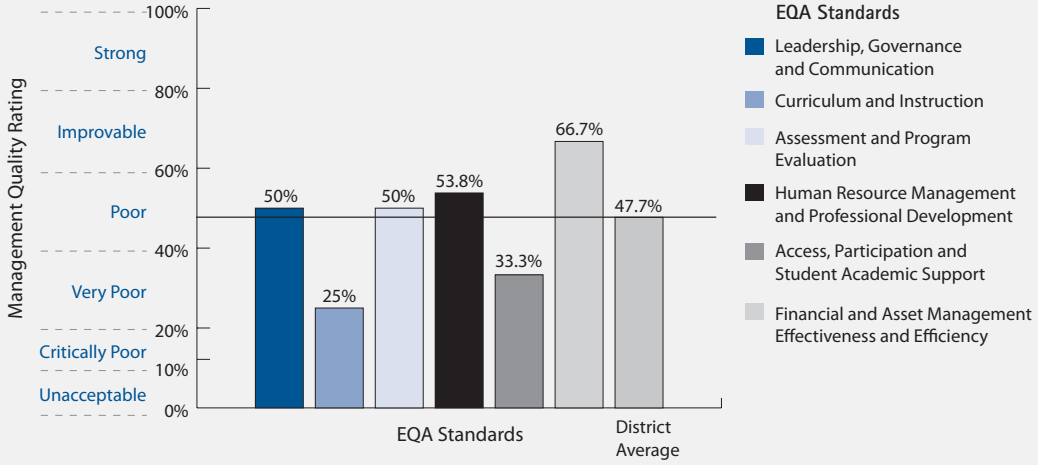
Overall District Management

To better understand the factors affecting student scores on the MCAS tests, the EQA analyzes district performance on 67 indicators in six areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. Taken together, these factors are a measure of the effectiveness — or quality — of a district's management system. A score of 100 percent on the Management Quality Index (MQI) means that the district meets the standard and performed at a satisfactory level on all indicators. However, it does not mean the district was perfect.

In 2006, Franklin County received an overall MQI score of 'Poor' (47.7 percent). The district performed best on the Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency standard, scoring 'Improvable.' It was rated 'Very Poor' on the Curriculum and Instruction standard. Given these ratings, the district is performing better than expected on the MCAS tests. During the review period, student performance improved considerably in both ELA and math. On the following pages, we take a closer look at the district's performance in each of the six standards.

A CLOSER LOOK AT MANAGEMENT QUALITY

Franklin County, 2004–2006



Leadership, Governance, and Communication

Ultimately, the success or failure of district leadership was determined by how well all students performed. As measured by MCAS test performance, Franklin County ranked among the 'High' performing school districts in the commonwealth, with scores that were 'High' in ELA and 'Moderate' in math.

Leadership and Communication

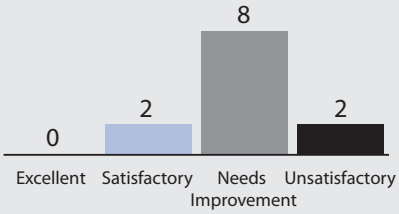
The leadership of the Franklin County Technical School consisted of the superintendent and the 24-member school committee. The school committee was aware of its responsibilities under the Education Reform Act of 1993. Subcommittees primarily focused on policies and finances. Knowledge of student achievement and other relevant data was exhibited by the school committee and utilized in members' decision-making. Representative city and town financial officials described an environment of support and collaboration between member communities and the district. The superintendent, business manager, and school committee communicated transparent information that engendered confidence and trust in the district. Visible community service projects and the skills of the graduates were seen as positive attributes by the region's member city and towns.

A district/school environment of support and teamwork existed between the administration and faculty in working toward improvement of student achievement. Administrators and faculty expressed the availability of information and the presence of fair treatment as major contributors to the collaborative culture. Although administrators and staff described some faculty resistance to the full implementation of improvement initiatives, an overall sense was conveyed that concerns and issues could be addressed. The superintendent delegated the educational and operational leadership of the school to the principal and administrators with the author-

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, vocational districts are rated on 12 indicators. Franklin County received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- A culture of cooperation, respect, and trust existed within the district/school community and with the regional member communities.
- An annual review of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) was conducted.

Areas for Improvement

- District and school improvement priorities were not standards based, as the attainment of goals was not measured in terms of student achievement data.
- Although the district had data available, it had no comprehensive system-wide data management structure to drive district/school improvement decision-making.
- The attainment of school improvement goals and student achievement data were not a basis of administrators' evaluation.
- Overlap in the lines of responsibility for administrative functions existed.

ity and responsibility to carry out the major administrative functions of the school. However, overlap in the lines of responsibility for administrative functions existed between the superintendent and administrators due to a lack of clarity in policy and practice, as well as the small size of the district.

Planning and Governance

District and school leaders considered the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and the weekly administrative meetings as the driving force for improvement of programs and services. Improvement priorities were not standards based, in that the attainment of goals was not measured in terms of student achievement data. The attainment of school improvement goals and student achievement data were not a basis of the administrator evaluation process. No formal selection, gathering, or use of these data was employed in the decision-making process. The generation and collection of data to measure student achievement relied on limited sources, and the district conducted minimal analysis and interpretation of the data. A summary was provided of the previous year's improvement plan goal attainment; progress was measured in terms of anecdotal data rather than quantifiable student achievement data.

The district provided competency-based and individualized vocational instruction. No requirement existed to collect, analyze, and interpret student competency assessment data to improve vocational instruction. Vocational competencies were currently being aligned with the 2005 Vocational Technical Education Frameworks.

Curriculum and Instruction

The Franklin County Technical School faced challenges in the areas of curriculum development and instructional practice — essential elements of efforts to improve student performance.

Aligned Curricula

The Franklin County Technical School did not have a consistently aligned curriculum in either the core academic areas or the vocational areas. The district had three different directors of curriculum during the review period, each with his or her own initiatives. In its most recent approach to curriculum development and review, the district paid stipends to teachers to write their own curricula. The district reported that it had a formal, schoolwide template addressing the components of a curriculum. On examination of curriculum samples, however, no consistent format was found, nor was there any professional development in this area, nor a formal system or structure for disseminating and evaluating the curriculum. A document review uncovered samples of curricula in social studies and math that included all components of a clearly aligned curriculum; however, these components were not widely shared nor adopted throughout the building. It was unclear as to how widely the curriculum was disseminated. Administrators were unable to provide details about the development or use of the samples reviewed. Although the district adopted new math textbooks prior to the review period, not every teacher used the materials, nor was there a system or structure in place to monitor implementation.

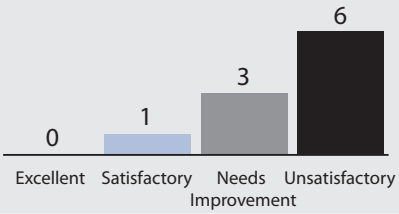
Effective Instruction

EQA examiners observed effective instructional practices at Franklin County Technical School in both the shops and the academic classrooms during the

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 10 performance indicators. Franklin County received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- Technology was widely available and used across the content areas.

Areas for Improvement

- The district had inconsistent curriculum guides in both academic and vocational areas. Several were only course outlines and were not clearly aligned with the Massachusetts curriculum frameworks.
- The curriculum did not uniformly address objectives, resources, instructional strategies, timelines, articulation maps, or measurable outcomes in either the academic or vocational areas.
- The curriculum in the core academic areas did not have consistent horizontal or vertical alignment, nor a regular review cycle.
- Instructional practices were teacher driven and varied widely across the content areas and throughout the vocational shops.
- The district did not require teachers to use assessment information in the planning of instruction.

site visit. However, the district had no formal policies or practices to support research-based, effective instruction. Rather, classroom and shop instructional practices were teacher dependent, inconsistent, and relied on informal sharing and ad hoc discussions. Interviews with faculty and administrators revealed an inconsistent focus on effective instructional practice and a lack of shared understanding of research-based instruction. A review of documents and interviews with faculty and administration did not reveal a system or structure to evaluate or refine instructional practice on either a departmental or schoolwide basis. The School Improvement Plans did not provide evidence of a focus in instructional practice on student achievement results. A review of teacher evaluations revealed a lack of connection between analysis of student achievement data and teacher evaluation. Furthermore, the policy manual did not clearly articulate high expectations for effective instruction as measured by student achievement data.

Assessment and Program Evaluation

Student assessment data include a wealth of information for district and school leaders on strengths and weaknesses in the local system, providing valuable input on where they should target their efforts to improve achievement.

Student Assessment

Between school year 2003-2004 and the EQA visit in 2006-2007, the district used several methods of student assessment. For most of the review period, the district regularly used the Accuplacer Computerized Placement Test. All grade 9 students took the test, and the results were used to place students into the most appropriate levels of math, ELA, and reading instruction. The results were also used to identify students who would benefit from additional support through the Title I program.

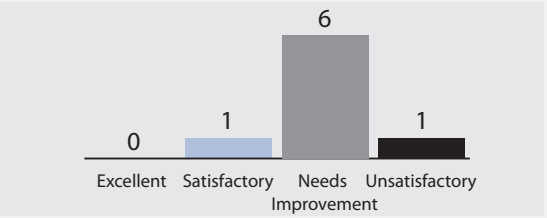
The district replaced the Accuplacer with the Basic Achievement Skills Inventory (BASI) at the beginning of school year 2006-2007 in an effort to improve the accuracy of placement decisions. The district also planned to use the BASI at the beginning of grades 10 and 11 to track student progress. The MCAS results were analyzed in the aggregate and item analyses were conducted to inform changes in curriculum and, to a lesser extent, instructional practice. Other forms of assessment were in use, generally for individual student evaluation or counseling purposes.

In addition to the MCAS and BASI tests, teacher-generated assessments were offered on a class by class basis. EQA examiners found little evidence of cooperation among teachers in developing group assessments, or in using common assessments for equivalent courses. The district had neither midterm nor final examinations in universal use, although some teachers reported using them independently. The district had no benchmarks or formal formative assessments in place to allow teachers to measure progress,

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 8 performance indicators. Franklin County received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The district collected data from the MCAS tests and the Basic Achievement Skills Inventory and analyzed them to determine aggregate student achievement.
- All students were encouraged to participate in all required assessments.

Areas for Improvement

- The district did not disaggregate student achievement data to inform efforts to improve subgroup performance or provide extra support to those groups.
- The district did not use local benchmarks or other assessment information to determine ongoing student progress.
- Other than required outside program audits and the NEASC accreditation, the district provided few external or internal reviews of program effectiveness in the academic areas.

although there was evidence that some teachers might be using them independently as well. One teacher reported the use of single concept in-class quizzes that functioned for him as benchmark assessments, but it was not clear whether similar practices were in use elsewhere. Teachers reported few departmental meetings at which best practices could be shared and disseminated, but the size and collegiality of the faculty allowed informal mechanisms of communication to develop naturally.

Program Evaluation

The district reported few structures for academic program evaluation in place during the review period. The district had no formal cycle for curriculum review and revision, resulting in little opportunity to formally assess program results. Programs such as Title I and special education were formally evaluated according to legislative requirements, and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accredited the school. In addition, third party industry groups such as the National Automotive Technicians Education Foundation and the National Institute for Metalworking Skills, among others, accredited several of the vocational programs for effective curriculum and instructional practices. All vocational programs evaluated students for competency attainment in order to provide competency report cards in grade 12 as a part of the student portfolio, but EQA examiners saw little evidence of the vocational programs conducting formal self-evaluations other than as a part of third party accreditations.

Human Resource Management and Professional Development

To improve student academic performance, school districts must recruit certified teaching staff, offer teacher mentoring programs and professional development opportunities, and evaluate instructional effectiveness on a regular basis in accordance with the provisions of the Education Reform Act of 1993.

Hiring Practices and Certification

District hiring practices focused on the local geographic area and consisted of internal postings and advertisements in the local newspaper, as well as routine postings on the Department of Education website. Interviewees were comfortable with the process, but some wondered if broader geographical advertising might yield other qualified candidates. The process was routinely consensual among administrators, and the superintendent made salary placement determinations. An ad hoc committee of the school committee comprised exclusively of school committee members filled the superintendent's vacancy that occurred during the review period.

New teachers received trained mentors during their first year in the district. All but three of the teachers held certification in their assigned area of instruction, and none taught out of field. Teachers without certification held appropriate DOE waivers; those individuals were vocational teachers from the areas of culinary arts, plumbing trades, and cosmetology, and they met frequently and at the end of the year with the principal to review and document their progress toward certification. All core academic teachers were identified as 'highly qualified' on the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Report Card.

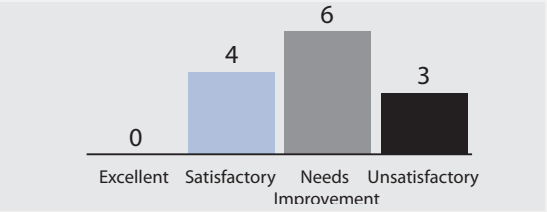
Professional Development

Informal conversations influenced the professional development program, and the administrative team considered suggestions during its weekly meetings. In-service professional

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, districts are rated on 13 performance indicators. Franklin County received the following ratings:



Areas of Strength

- The district placed a high value on creating promotional opportunities for effective teachers as evidenced by internal promotions.
- Administrators stated that they considered the new hires resulting from staff turnover as opportunities to strength the staff to meet identified district needs.

Areas for Improvement

- The professional development program was not informed by program evaluation, and only two of four new course offerings were accompanied by professional development activities.
- The district's four-year evaluation cycle for teachers did not comply with state law in that it did not prescribe formal evaluation for each professional status teacher in the third year of the cycle.

development activities took place at monthly two-hour delayed openings. The district made $1,200 available individually for reimbursement for participation in professional development activities to all district personnel including teachers, secretaries, paraprofessionals, and maintenance personnel. Other than as mandated by grant programs, program evaluation did not take place during the review period. Two staff members took part in four-day training in the 2006-2007 school year on the process of tracking and using data to improve student achievement as part of a DOE pilot Using Data Project, of which data warehousing was a part. They were to function as data coaches and train the rest of the staff. Professional development accompanied programmatic changes in two of four instances during the review period.

Evaluation

The school committee evaluated the superintendent annually, placing the documents in the superintendent evaluation subcommittee's file rather than superintendents' personnel files. All district staff also annually evaluated the superintendent on a voluntary and anonymous basis. The chairperson of the superintendent evaluation subcommittee compiled the ratings and comments and presented them to the superintendent along with the committee's evaluation. EQA examiners received a blank copy of the evaluation form and copies of school committee members' comments regarding the incumbent superintendent and the superintendent who served in 2003, but did not receive the actual school committee evaluations of the superintendent.

Administrator evaluation practices did not comply with statute. Contracts and evaluations failed to produce evidence that the superintendent and principal specifically linked improved student performance to district administrators' compensation. The former superintendent, at the direction of the school committee, modified the administrator evaluation instrument to reflect the administrators' job descriptions. Unlike the previous instrument, this one did not contain the components of education reform. Administrators perceived administrative evaluation as frequent, informal observation over time that lacked specific goal setting.

Effective systems of supervision were not in place to implement programs and goals for improving student achievement. The district implemented supervision through weekly administrative meetings and frequent, informal, and individual dialogue among and between administrators and teachers. Evaluation practices for teachers did not comply with statute in that the four-year evaluation cycle did not prescribe formal evaluation for professional status teachers in the third year of the cycle (observation phase). In that year, the teacher would select three peers to observe him or her for that school year. The supervisor received the written observations, summarized them, and used that summary as the evaluation for the year.

Access, Participation, and Student Academic Support

Students who are at risk of failing or dropping out need additional support to ensure that they stay in school and achieve proficiency.

Services

Between 2003 and 2006, the vocational shops operated at Franklin County Technical School included automotive technology, carpentry, cosmetology, culinary arts, electrical, health assisting, HVAC/heating technology, information technology, landscaping/horticulture, machine technology, office technology, pre-employment program, plumbing, and welding/metal fabrication. The guidance department provided academic support services along with the coordinator of pupil personnel services, school nurse, special education teachers, and Title I reading and mathematics teachers.

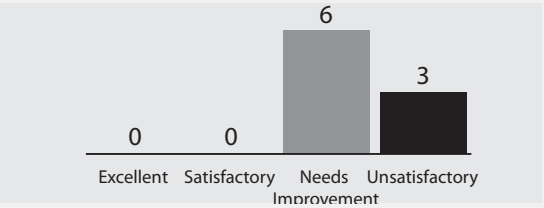
Guidance academic support services staff advised students on class schedules, academic issues, and post-graduation plans, managed remediation and tutoring support, provided counseling for personal issues and family crises, provided/adjusted special education accommodations offered under section 504, provided Title I services, provided health services, and made initial parent contacts about student absences.

Special education students were included in all classrooms and shops, although no instructional aides were used except in a substantially separate pre-employment program. Low-income students had access to all courses and shops. Data were not analyzed to increase the numbers of subgroup students in higher-level programs. During the period reviewed, school staff reviewed assessment data but did not use a systematic approach to gather, analyze, and act upon benchmark and summative data in order to increase subgroup participation in higher level programs.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, vocational districts are rated on 9 indicators. Franklin County received the following ratings:



Areas for Improvement

- Franklin County Technical School staff did not use disaggregated student achievement data to determine instructional adjustments and provide additional programs to improve achievement for at-risk populations.
- The district staff did not use benchmark assessments and summative data in a systematic way to identify all students not meeting expectations and deliver remedial services to improve MCAS test proficiency.
- Professional staff absenteeism rates averaged 12.47 days even when long-term illnesses were dropped from the calculation.
- During the review period, no dropout recovery program was in place at Franklin County Technical School.
- Staff did not use a data-driven approach to increase the number of special needs and low-income students represented in advanced programs.

Attendance

The district was below statewide averages in student and staff attendance rates. The district's dropout rates were below the state averages. The rate of student chronic absenteeism was 19.8 percent in 2003-2004, 22.1 percent in 2004-2005, and 17.9 percent in 2005-2006. The rate was over 28 percent for the senior class in 2005-2006, according to Department of Education statistics. During the review period, the district had no programs in place to recover dropouts and retain the maximum participation of students through graduation.

Discipline and Dropout Prevention

The dean of students administered student discipline. Administrators handled teacher referrals of students to the office, assigned students to after-school detentions, and suspended students. If the student behavior needed mediation, the guidance staff supervised peer mediators in the mediation process.

Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency

Effective districts develop budgets based on student needs, submit financial documentation in a timely fashion, employ staff with MCPPO credentials, and ensure that their facilities are well maintained.

Budget Process

The budget process commenced annually in November with budget requests submitted by the faculty. The business manager collated the results of the requests into a budget workbook document, which the superintendent, director of curriculum and instruction, and the principal received. In December or January, the administration met to reduce the requests to an acceptable level that could be supported by the anticipated revenue sources. The district relied on its excess and deficiency (E&D) account, tuition, and other miscellaneous revenue sources to reduce the assessment to a level that the member municipalities would accept. The school improvement council and the vocational-technical advisory committees did not participate in the development of the budget. The budget workbook included information from other fund sources, such as state and federal grants, revolving accounts, Medicaid, and other revenue sources. The school committee finance subcommittee reviewed the proposed budget at several meetings followed by a recommendation to the full school committee. A public hearing was held, followed by the final approval of the budget and assessments. The superintendent and business manager attended both municipal finance committee and town meetings. During the review period, the member city and towns had been supportive by approving the district's assessment. The district used student achievement data to modify curriculum and programs, although there was not a connection between budget development and student achievement data. Formal evaluation of programs and practices did not occur to determine cost effectiveness. Enrollment data had been used to review vocational-technical, academic, and special education programs.

Performance at a Glance

Ratings on Performance Indicators

In this area, vocational districts are rated on 12 indicators. Franklin County received the following ratings:

Areas of Strength

- The district municipalities approved sufficient resources, as indicated by the district exceeding the required net school spending.
- The per pupil cost was $17,508 in FY 2006, which ranked the district sixth out of 26 regional vocational technical school districts in the state.
- The budget process was open and participatory, and it included input from the faculty and staff.
- The district had a five-year capital plan for equipment and maintenance. Most recently, the district allocated $100,000 per year toward this effort to meet current educational and maintenance standards.

Areas for Improvement

- The district did not have a formal written maintenance program. The examiners noted a need to improve the upkeep of the school building and the grounds.
- The school lacked adequate security to ensure school safety. The facility did not have cameras or other electronic surveillance devices.
- The budget process did not involve the school improvement council or vocational-technical advisory committees.

Financial Support

The superintendent stated that the budget and assessments had been based on the educational needs of the students for providing quality education using available resources. Interviews with administrators, teachers, school committee members, and town officials confirmed the adequacy of the budget approved by the communities, which provided the necessary support to ensure educationally sound programs. The district exceeded the required net school spending (NSS) for the period under review. The FY 2006 per pupil cost was $17,508, which ranked the district sixth out of 26 regional vocational-technical districts. The budget was $6,647,589 in FY 2004, $7,187,225 in FY 2005, and $7,830,300 in FY 2006, an 18 percent increase for the period. Analysis of the municipal revenue growth factor (MRGF) showed compatible increase with the municipality assessments. The assessments had been held to an acceptable increase by the use of E&D, tuition, and other revenue sources. Discussions with the superintendent, faculty, and town officials indicated the adequacy of the individual department budgets.

Facilities and Safety

The school facility, which opened in 1976, had not had substantial improvement or renovation. This resulted in the required increase in the maintenance budget for the HVAC and other systems. The school had carpeting throughout the building that required replacement. A walk-through of the building by the EQA examiners noted a need to improve the maintenance and cleanliness of the facilities. The outside grounds and courtyard had been determined to need attention. The current energy plan had been developed on a computer running a DOS operating system and had not been updated to current standards. The district did not have a formal written preventive maintenance program to prolong the life of the building. The district had a feasibility study conducted in August 2002 that outlined the facility's condition and areas in need of renovation and improvement. No substantial action had been taken during the review period to improve the condition of the facilities, in part because of a statewide moratorium on state funding for building and renovation projects. The school committee voted to allocate $100,000 annually toward capital projects or equipment as part of the budget.

CONCLUSION

The Franklin County Regional Vocational Technical School District was considered to be a 'High' performing district, marked by student achievement that was 'High' in ELA and 'Moderate' in math during the review period as measured by the MCAS tests. Nearly three-fifths of Franklin County's students scored at or above the proficiency standard on the 2006 administration of the MCAS tests. The EQA gave the district a Management Quality Index rating of 'Poor,' with the highest rating in Financial and Asset Management Effectiveness and Efficiency, and the lowest in Curriculum and Instruction.

During the review period, the small size of the Franklin County Technical School provided both benefits and challenges to the administration. The school district was characterized by a spirit of mutual trust, but also inconsistent leadership. The staff was collaborative, and the district had many informal systems of communication, planning, assessment, and supervision. The informal atmosphere often impeded efficiency and effectiveness, and accountability was at times lacking. District leaders had trouble finding a balance between fostering collegiality and maintaining high standards for performance.

City and town officials described an environment of support and collaboration between member communities and the district. The superintendent, business manager, and school committee transparently communicated information that engendered confidence and trust in the district. Community service projects and the skills acquired by graduates were viewed positively by the region's member communities.

The superintendent delegated the educational and operational leadership of the school to the principal and administrators. However, overlap in the lines of responsibility for administrative functions existed between the superintendent and administrators due to a lack of clarity in policy and practice, as well as the small size of the district.

Although Franklin County Technical School's MCAS performance improved substantially during the review period, the district struggled with curriculum alignment, analysis of student data, program evaluation, performance evaluation, student academic support services, dropout and attendance rates, safety plans, and facilities. During the review period, the rate of student chronic absenteeism was high, and the senior class's chronic absenteeism rate exceeded 28 percent in 2005-2006, according to the Department of Education.

The district collected data from the MCAS tests and the Basic Achievement Skills Inventory (starting in 2006-2007) and analyzed them to determine aggregate student achievement, but it did not disaggregate data to inform efforts to improve subgroup performance or provide

extra support to those populations. Improvement priorities were not standards based, in that the attainment of goals was not measured in terms of student achievement data. Examiners found no connection between student achievement and budget allocation. Few programs were evaluated for effectiveness.

The district's attempt to coordinate curriculum development and review was inconsistent because of high turnover in the position of director of curriculum, and it paid teachers stipends to write their own curricula. As a result, curriculum was largely teacher based and the district lacked a consistently aligned curriculum in both academic and vocational areas.

The principal planned professional development activities with little input from staff members and student achievement data. Staff supervision was not systematized and consistently applied. Supervision of teachers was based on informal and frequent individual discussion between administrators and teachers.

During the site visit, the EQA examiners observed a total of 21 randomly selected classrooms. While they found strong evidence of effective classroom management and climate, they found fewer indicators of effective instructional practice, high expectations, and positive student activity. EQA examiners visited the school district during the final days of the academic cycle of the school year. Students had finished MCAS testing, and most were completing work on portfolios or shop projects. As a result, examiners' observations of instructional practice may not have accurately reflected instructional practices in place for the majority of the school year.

Examiners also found that the district lacked adequate security to ensure school safety, as there were no security cameras in or outside the building, which could be entered without detection. The school facility, which opened in 1976, was in need of substantial improvement and renovation.

The picture that emerged of Franklin County Technical School was that of a content but complacent district, one that needed to refocus its mission, systematize its policies and practices, and increase its efforts to improve student performance.

APPENDIX A: EQA'S DISTRICT EXAMINATION PROCESS

EQA's examination process provides successively deeper levels of information about student performance. All school districts receive an MCAS data review annually, but they do not all receive the full examination every year.

Based on the MCAS results, Educational Management Audit Council (EMAC) policy, and random sampling, approximately 60 districts statewide received a site review. Still other districts — those that do not meet certain performance criteria set by the state Department of Education — received an even more detailed review.

Data-Driven Assessment

Annually, the DOE and EQA's staff assess each public school district's results on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests to find out how students are performing. This review seeks to answer five basic questions:

1. Are the district's students reaching proficiency levels on MCAS?
2. Do MCAS test results vary among subgroups of students (such as minority and low-income students and students with disabilities)?
3. Has the district's MCAS test performance improved over time?
4. Has the MCAS test performance of the district's student subgroups improved over time?
5. Are all eligible students participating in required state assessments?

Standards-Based Examination

Districts with MCAS results that fall within certain thresholds of performance, particularly districts that score below average, may be selected to receive a site review. This review seeks to provide a more complete picture of why the district is performing at that level, examining district management, planning, and actions and how they are implemented at the building level. It focuses in particular on whether the district uses data to inform its efforts.

The report analyzes district performance in six major areas: leadership, governance, and communication; curriculum and instruction; assessment and program evaluation; human resource management and professional development; access, participation, and student academic support; and financial and asset management effectiveness and efficiency. EQA examines a total of 67 indicators to assess whether the district is meeting the standards and provides a rating for each indicator.

APPENDIX B: EXPLANATION OF TERMS USED IN EQA REPORTS

ABA: Applied Behavioral Analysis

ADA: Average Daily Attendance

ALT: MCAS Alternative Assessment

API: Average Proficiency Index (of the English Language Arts Proficiency Index and Math Proficiency Index for all students)

ATA: Accountability and Targeted Assistance

AYP: Adequate Yearly Progress

CAP: Corrective Action Plan

CBM: Curriculum-Based Measures

CD: Competency Determination — the state's interim Adequate Yearly Progress indicator for high schools based on grade 10 MCAS test passing rates

CMP: Connected Math Program

CORI: Criminal Offender Record Information

CPI: Composite Proficiency Index — a 100-point index combining students' scores on the standard MCAS and MCAS Alternative Assessment (ALT)

CPR: Coordinated Program Review — conducted on Federal Education Acts by the DOE

CRT: Criterion-Referenced Test

CSR: Comprehensive School Reform

DCAP: District Curriculum Accommodation Plan

DIBELS: Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills

DIP: District Improvement Plan

DOE: Department of Education

DPDP: District Professional Development Plan

DRA: Developmental Reading Assessment

ELA: English Language Arts

ELL: English Language Learners

EPI: English Language Arts Proficiency Index

ESL: English as a Second Language

FLNE: First Language Not English

FRL/N: Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/No

FRL/Y: Free and Reduced-Price Lunch/Yes

FTE: Full-Time Equivalent

FY: Fiscal Year

Gap Analysis: A statistical method to analyze the relationships between and among district and subgroup performance and the standard of 100 percent proficiency

GASB: Government Accounting Standards Board

GMADE: Group Math Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation

GRADE: Group Reading Assessment and Diagnostic Evaluation

GRADU: The graduation yield rate for a class four years from entry

IEP: Individualized Education Program

Improvement Gap: A measure of change in a combination of the proficiency gap and performance gap between two points in time; a positive improvement gap will show improvement and convergence between subgroups' performance over time

IPDP: Individual Professional Development Plan

IRIP: Individual Reading Improvement Plan

ISSP: Individual Student Success Plan

LASW: Looking at Student Work

LEP: Limited English Proficient

MASBO: Massachusetts Association of School Business Officials

MASC: Massachusetts Association of School Committees

MASS: Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents

MAVA: Massachusetts Association of Vocational Administrators

MCAS: Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System

MCAS-Alt: Alternative Assessment — a portfolio option for special needs students to demonstrate proficiency

MCPPO: Massachusetts Certified Public Purchasing Official

MELA-O: Massachusetts English Language Assessment-Oral

MEPA: Massachusetts English Proficiency Assessment

MPI: Math Proficiency Index

MQI: Management Quality Index — an indicator of the relative strength and effectiveness of a district's management system

MUNIS: Municipal Information System

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

NCLB: No Child Left Behind

NEASC: New England Association of Schools and Colleges

NRT: Norm-Referenced Test

NSBA: National School Boards Association

NSS: Net School Spending

Performance Gap: A measure of the range of the difference of performance between any subgroup's Proficiency Index and another subgroup's in a given district

PI: Proficiency Index — a number between 0–100 representing the extent to which students are progressing toward proficiency

PIM: Performance Improvement Management

PQA: Program Quality Assurance — a division of the DOE responsible for conducting the Coordinated Program Review process

Proficiency Gap: A measure of a district or subgroup's Proficiency Index and its distance from 100 percent proficiency

QRI: Qualitative Reading Inventory

Rate of Improvement: The result of dividing the gain (improvement in achievement as measured by Proficiency Index points) by the proficiency gap

SAT: A test administered by the Educational Testing Service to 11th and 12th graders

SEI: Sheltered English Immersion

SIMS: Student Information Management System

SIOP: Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol

SIP: School Improvement Plan

SPED: Special Education

STE: Science and Technology/Engineering

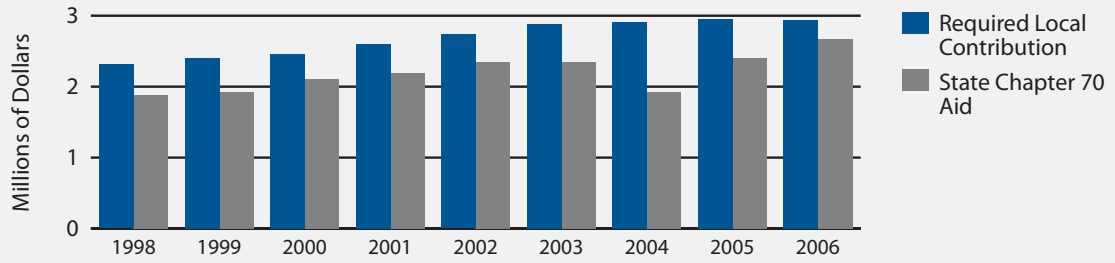
TerraNova: K–12 norm-referenced test series published by CTB/McGraw-Hill

APPENDIX C: STATE AND LOCAL FUNDING, 1998–2006

A school district's funding is determined in part by the Chapter 70 program — the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to supporting school operations, it also establishes minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs. The following chart shows the amount of Franklin's funding that was derived from the state and the amount that the town was required to contribute.

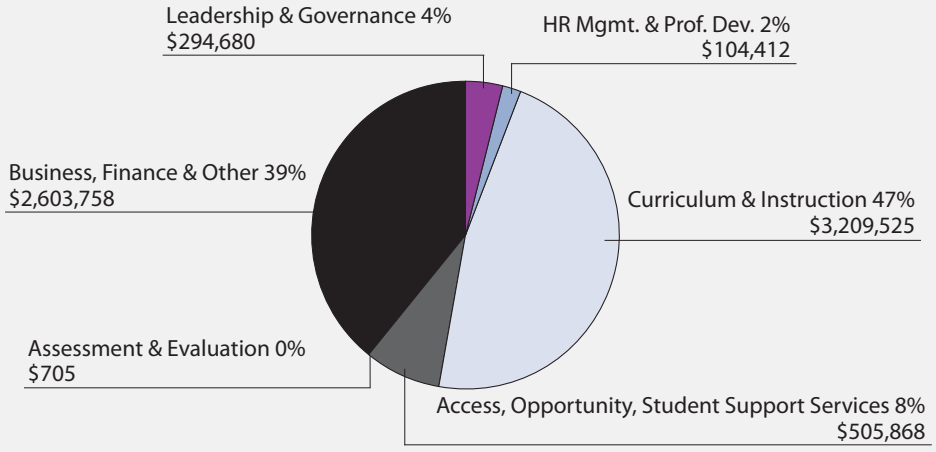
The district exceeded the state net school spending requirement in each year of the review period. From FY 2004 to FY 2006, net school spending increased from $5,831,923 to $6,991,954; Chapter 70 aid increased from $1,925,246 to $2,670,649; the required local contribution increased from $2,908,214 to $2,938,885; and the foundation enrollment increased from 484 to 495. Chapter 70 aid as a percentage of actual net school spending increased from 33 to 38 percent over this period. From FY 2004 to FY 2005, total curriculum and instruction expenditures as a percentage of total net school spending decreased from 62 to 59 percent.

WHERE DOES THE FUNDING FOR FRANKLIN COUNTY TECHNICAL SCHOOL COME FROM?



HOW IS THE FUNDING FOR FRANKLIN COUNTY TECHNICAL SCHOOL ALLOCATED?

FY05 Expenditures By EQA Standards (With City/Town Charges)



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